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AUTHOR Neustupny, J.V.
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ABSTRACT

Japan is taking her place as a bastion of apparent linguistic stability. The basic concept used in this paper is "language correction." The assumption is that generative rules of language produce inadequate communicative acts that may be corrected through corrective rules. Japan in the last century has passed through a number of policy-type language correction processes contributing to the creation of present-day Japanese. Following World War II great reforms of the Japanese writing system were effected through the National Language Council. The number of characters in public use was limited to 1850, character shapes were simplified and readings defined, and "kana" spelling was made almost entirely phonetic. These reforms pushed the language of the public domain and the school closer to the spoken language. However, no reforms have been implemented since then. Government corrections have frequently been made in place names and weights and measures systems. Schools place some emphasis on written language, but outside reading counterbalances this influence. Mass media also modify language. Public correction is highly developed, in lectures, publications and courses on language matters. Generally the trend is away from a "policy" approach and toward a "cultivation" approach. (CHK)

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Language Correction In Contemporary Japan

J. V. Neustupný*

The way in which language problems appear on the stage of history closely follows the patterned order in which other social problems receive conscious attention. There are periods when in social theories the existence of social conflict in general is denied and this is also the time when the range of language problems which are publicly acknowledged radically narrows. While most countries of the West have just left this era of "language cultivation" (Neustupný 1970) it seems that Japan is taking her place, establishing herself, after a century of vigorous "language policy" activities, as a bastion of apparent linguistic stability.

The basic concept which will be used in the following discussion is "language correction". Our assumption is that the *generative* rules of language inadvertently produce "inadequate" communicative acts, which may be corrected through the second largest set of rules we possess within our system of communicative competence, the *corrective* rules (Neustupný 1973). Some of these corrective rules are highly complex and systematic, for instance the rules of language treatment (i.e. language planning, cultivation, policy etc.). Other rules are simple and quite automatic (pre-correction in formal situations, re-issuance of misunderstood sequences, etc.).

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The role of language treatment in Japan

In the course of her linguistic macro-modernization (Neustupný 1974) Japan has in the last hundred years passed through a number of "policy" type language correction processes which have substantially contributed to the creation of present day Japanese. The existence of language problems was publicly acknowledged and language treatment, i.e. correction acts in networks specializing in general language correction, flourished (Hirai 1948). This was especially true of discussions concerning possible policies. On the other hand, the corrective acts actually implemented more often belonged to networks other than language treatment: language teaching (Mombusho), public correction by individuals (formation of lexicon), or the often unnoticed "simple correction" by isolated speakers.

Only at the very end of this macro-modernization stage, in the first few years following the end of World War II, did language treatment play a genuinely important role. It was through the National Language Council (Kokugo shingikai) that the great reforms of the Japanese system of writing were carried out. The number of characters in "public" use was limited to 1850 (plus some extra characters for personal given names), the shapes of characters were simplified and their accepted readings defined, and the *kana* spelling was made almost entirely phonetic. These reforms forcibly pushed the language of the public domain and of the school even closer to the spoken language, partly by increasing the weight of the phonetic principle, partly by eliminating a large number of purely written words and morphemes from the language. These measures were not a minor spelling reform; they meant the adoption of an entirely new variety of language. Implemented in the governmental sector, the newspapers and broadcasting media, and in the system of compulsory school education, the reforms were successful with regard to these controlled domains. Other domains of communication however retained their independence, which in some cases implied the use of a somewhat higher number of characters.

However, observers of the Japanese system of language reatment, both overseas and in Japan, do not seem to realize that these post-war reforms of the Japanese language were the final word of the

(Continued on page 3)

*Dr. Neustupny is chairman of the Department of Japanese, Monash University.

"policy" approach to language problems in Japan. The National Language Council continued its work but most of it was clearly concerned with more detailed questions and restricted to recommendations unaccompanied by implementation (cf. Bunkachō . . . and Kokugo shingikai . . .). The second stage of the language reforms, the complete phoneticization of the script—awaited with hope by some participants in the language treatment networks—never eventuated. And when the National Language Council attempted the only coercive decree of the 1950's, the ruling about the *kana* spelling of endings and particles *(okurigana)*, public reaction was largely negative and the decree was generally rated as a failure.

It was not until the 1970's that the National Language Council embarked on another implementable project, a review of the post-war reforms. This project, which has already resulted in a slight increase in the role of characters within the controlled domains, has sometimes been interpreted as a return to the "policy" approach, and a conservative one at that. Whatever the claims of various participants in the process may be, we should clearly realize however that this review does not mean a new reform. It simply acknowledges the *status quo* in other than the controlled domains, and tries to establish rules which reflect actual current usage rather than the ideal system of the post-war reforms. Changes in the rules are small anyway, so that the resulting impression is clearly that of language "cultivation" rather than of a "policy".

It is hardly thinkable that the Japanese language treatment would return to an active reformist programme. There are, of course, views which favour further restriction of the role of characters, as well as views which prefer a return to the pre-war language. The prevailing position within the community at large is however a moderate "leave your language alone" attitude, and this attitude can ot be ignored by the National Language Council.

Direct governmental correction

Modern and contemporary governments often conduct language correction acts directly, without the mediation of the governmental language treatment agencies. In Japan the name of the country used in international relation (Olympics, postage stamps, etc.) has been codified as Nippon, not Nihon; a large number of place names have been changed; and the final touch on the metrication of weights and measures was effected during the last two decades. There were of course negative comments from the public, especially with regard to new place names, but on the whole these changes were implemented without any serious challenge. We should also remember that the metrication reforms were much less radical than similar enactments in some Western countries (e.g. the change of the currency denomination and metrication in Australia), because most of the society was already working on the metric principle.

Native language teaching as a system of language correction

In modern social systems the acquisition of the elaborate standard language is normally conducted in classroom situations. During the macro-modernization "policy" period the communities strictly control the selection of the model texts (textbooks) and such texts are studied in great detail. There is an emphasis on the elaborate written styles, on terminological taxonomies etc. Once the standard is well established, the society enters into the micro-modernization period: the conscious control of the community over the classroom acquisition process loosens and emphasis is placed rather on detail than on overall competence.

In present-day Japan we do find some emphasis on the written language, taxonomies, explicit grammar. Even though there is some freedom of selection there are set textbooks for the national language and these texts are very brief. On the other hand we should not fail to see that the inadequacy in these areas is clearly perceived and gradually removed. At the same time, it must be noted that in Japan the classroom, perhaps increasingly, is not the only, and perhaps not even the dominant scene, of the acquisition of the standard language. Not only do many children master at least some elements of the writing system before entering the primary school, but throughout their school attendance they often continue very extensive extramural reading which substantially counterbalances the normative function of the school.

Foreign language teaching

Foreign language teaching can serve as an important tool for the solution of problems of communication with other communities. During Japan's macro-modernization period foreign language teaching did fulfil the corrective function, i.e. it did serve the needs of international communication, and produced the necessary capacity for translation and other forms of contact with the West. In the later period however the corrective role was lost and foreign language teaching developed into a hypertrophical self-perpetuating system of which the acquisition of competence was only a marginal objective.

In 1974 a most interesting discussion was initiated in an amazingly modern spirit by a member of the House of Councillors, Wataru Hiraizumi (Hiraizumi and Watanabe 1975). He proposed drastic cuts in the number of children who should learn English and suggested that the saved resources should be utilized for increasing the efficiency of teaching. The point was certainly well noted by the Japanese public, but failed to make any radical lasting impression on members of the huge English teaching profession (Kumabe 1975). It would seem that in the same way as in other areas of language correction, large-scale reforms are at present unfeasible. The society has of course developed certain alternatives to the inefficient school teaching of English, mainly in private tuition and in overseas travel.

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Language correction within mass media networks

Active language correction by the mass media seems to be a relatively modern phenomenon. The Japan Newspaper Publishers' and Editors' Association (Nihon shinbun kyōkai) and the Japan Broadcasting Corporation (NHK) are very active in "cultivating" language in the daily press and in broadcasting. These organizations not only implement, with some modifications, the decisions of the National Language Council but go beyond this by codifying usage where the National Language Council has not been specific enough. NHK, in particular, regularly makes decisions implemented within its nation-wide networks (for annual summaries see Kokugo nenkan).

Of a similar nature, though on a much narrower basis, is the regulation of language, especially of honorific usage, within the telecommunication services, large companies dealing with the public, banks, and even small shopping centres.

Public correction

I shall call "public correction" the broad area of language correction in networks which presuppose voluntary individual participation of members of the public: lectures on language matters, comments on language by the daily press and broadcasting media, general publications on language and language problems and language textbooks, translations, courses for children (calligraphy) and adults.

This area of language correction has been highly developed in Japan and has often acted as a bridge between the language treatment area and the individual adult user of the language. It has worked in both directions: informing the public about language treatment issues and decisions, and informing the language treatment networks about the attitudes of the public.

The two most prominent recent issues in public correction networks in Japan have been the so-called "Japanese linguistics boom" in the publishing world, and the increasing attention paid to the problem of *sabetsugo* (discrimination in language). Among these the former has however probably not been precipitated by language problems although some of the linguistic bestsellers do discuss language correction (Suzuki 1975). The latter is a typical case of language "cultivation". It is interesting to note that to my knowledge no radical suggestions concerning male and female language have so far been presented. What should also be noted is an almost complete absence of any radical reformist suggestions concerning the phoneticization of the script, the removal or insertion of whole varieties or systems. The area of public correction at present strongly favours the "cultivation" mood within the whole sphere of language correction.

Translation deserves a separate note. It has always played a very active role in Japanese language correction—both by making available particular texts, and, secondarily, by producing new means of communication. In contemporary Japan translation is extremely extensive though it has never developed into a profession. On the whole it has probably largely lost its initial highly creative character. Within a modern society the linguistic influence of an individual is necessarily limited, and this affects the translator in the same way as an author or anyone else.

Private correction

Under the term "private correction" I propose to deal with those corrective acts which, unlike an individual's participation in language treatment, language teaching or public correction, are not conducted in the public networks. Private correction includes correction of individual utterances but it also covers the field of an individual's publicly unprofessed attitudes to language, rules for the correction of children's language, etc. Private correction is normally unsystematic and unrigorous (Neustupný 1970). It may be strongly influenced by the more rigorous systems of correction, but some of its rules may be the direct consequence of the speaker's communicative experience and may have never passed a public network. This is certainly the case of "simple" private correction.

By "simple" private correction I mean correction in which the decoding of the inadequacy in communication (Neustupný 1973) implies the minimum degree of awareness and in which the correction process itself immediately follows, according to unconscious simple rules. This is the case of correction or hypercorrection of one's speech in formal situation, repetition of a word, a request for clarification, etc.

The area of private correction, especially that of simple correction, has been almost totally ignored by language planners, and there is little I can say about its structure in contemporary Japan. It seems that the emphasis is on the more classical pre-correction, i.e. the application of correction rules *before* a message is produced. The typical modern pattern of correction through reissuance, which results in repetition and verbosity, seems however to be gaining ground. Post-correction, e.g. a request for clarification, still seems to be strongly limited by honorific considerations.

Conclusions

The concept of language correction has enabled us to observe Japan's language treatment system within a wide environment of processes all of which aim at the removal of inadequacy in communicative acts. No doubt, the list of such processes given above is still very incomplete and needs further substantial additions and restructuring. One thing however is certain—each of the mentioned areas is supported by the others and cannot be understood without reference to the entirety of language correction.

Many types of language correction rules in Japan

(Continued on page 5)

seem to be governed by the same general principle. I have tried to argue that the present trend is to turn away from the reformist past and to pay attention to some more detailed problems of linguistic micro-modernization. In other words, we are witnesses to an almost completed transition from a "policy" approach to language problems to a "cultivation" approach. This trend is by the way not entirely different from some recent developments in the socio-political area in Japan in general.

This does not mean that macroscopic problems do not exist. Linguistically, as well as in other branches of culture, Japan is laden with variation—ethnic (apart from at least 3/4 million Koreans there are also Ainu and Chinese minorities), regional (regional accents), social (restricted access to elaborate communication, etc.). The linguistic variables are the source of language problems which seem to me, at present, to escape the attention of the more systematic and rigorous systems of language correction. Within the private correction networks there is no doubt that such problems do exist. Will they continue to be ignored by the higher echelons of language correction, in the same way as the corresponding problems were ignored in Europe and America before the 1960's? It seems that this may not necessarily be the case: the Korean problem is already receiving some attention; and if the consideration of "discrimination in speech" further develops, it may ultimately also include social class distinctions in speech. In this connection, the question of interference from the contemporary Western correction systems is of considerable interest. □

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